

NEWS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*

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NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES: HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

In a continuous struggle for survival, many species of plants and animals face serious risk of vanishing forever because of diminishing habitat. Nearly a century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt demonstrated his concern about our Nation's wildlife and began our National Wildlife Refuge System at Pelican Island off Florida's east coast.

National wildlife refuges were originally established to protect habitat along migratory bird flyways as well as breeding and wintering grounds for waterfowl and other wildlife. Since passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, 58 national wildlife refuges have been established to manage habitat for threatened and endangered species. Here are a few:

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge located near Titusville, Florida, is not only home to NASA's Kennedy Space Center but is also an exciting place to watch and photograph wildlife including 16 endangered species such as West Indian (Florida) manatees, bald eagles, and Kemp's Ridley sea turtles.

Lake Wales National Wildlife Refuge, a satellite unit of Merritt Island, was the first national wildlife refuge established to protect one of the last remnants of Florida's upland scrub, important habitat for the Florida scrub jay, eastern indigo snake, and more than 19 endangered plants.

Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, another satellite unit of Merritt Island, protects nesting habitat for more than 10,000 loggerhead sea turtles, the largest Western Hemisphere concentration of loggerheads and second largest in the world, and is also home to four other endangered sea turtles.

Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge on Key Largo provides home to American crocodiles, the largest and one of the rarest North American reptiles, while Florida Panther and Key Deer national wildlife refuges provide habitat for their respective namesakes, the elusive Florida panther and the tiny Key deer, a miniature version of the white-tail.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, located 25 miles outside Pahrump, Nevada, (90 miles west of Las Vegas) is an oasis of 30 springs and seeps surrounded by 100 miles of harsh Mojave Desert.

This unique and isolated refuge protects habitat for many species found nowhere else in the world. Ash Meadows has even been called the "Galapagos of the United States." The refuge has



AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes naturally!

primitive trails along crystal clear springs where visitors can observe four endangered fish: Ash Meadows pupfish, Warm Springs pupfish, Devil's Hole pupfish, and Ash Meadows speckled dace. Ash Meadows is the only habitat in the world for seven species of endangered plants and the endangered Ash Meadows naucorid beetle.

Nearby **Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge** is home to the endangered Moapa dace, a small fish, while **Desert National Wildlife Refuge** harbors the threatened desert tortoise.

Gray wolves can be heard howling at night from campgrounds near **Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge** in northern Minnesota. Bald eagles also nest here in one of the westernmost extensions of black spruce-tamarack bog, the peat-filled remnant of a glacial lake formed during the last ice age. Nearby state lands protect the endangered and beautiful western prairie fringed orchid. Agassiz refuge is close to the town of Thief River Falls and offers both a wildlife auto tour route and visitor center.

Along the Southeast coast, the endangered red wolf, a smaller and more solitary cousin of the gray wolf, has been reintroduced to **Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge** near Manteo, North Carolina, and **Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge** 20 miles north of Charleston, South Carolina. Both of these refuges are also home to the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

In southern California, **Seal Beach** and **Tijuana Slough** national wildlife refuges provide some of the last habitat for the endangered light-footed clapper rail, California least terns, and brown pelicans. Farther north at **San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge**, visitors may see these as well as western snowy plovers or maybe even a colorful San Francisco garter snake.

One of the most exciting endangered species recovery programs is taking place at **Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge** near Ventura, where California condors have been returned to the wild and can sometimes be spotted soaring over the adjacent Los Padres National Forest.

For a taste of the sub-tropics, try visiting the Lower Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas where **Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge** in Rio Hondo holds some of our Nation's last remaining habitat for two endangered cats, the ocelot and jaguarundi. Just up the Gulf Coast, **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge** is the wintering home for the world's last wild population of whooping cranes, America's tallest birds.

West Virginia hosts **Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge**, the 500th refuge and home of the Cheat Mountain salamander and northern flying squirrel, while **Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge** in Parkersburg provides habitat for numerous rare plants, migratory birds, and 55 species of fish.

For those who really like to get away, 14 national wildlife refuges in Hawaii and the South Pacific provide habitat for millions of seabirds as well as sea turtles and Hawaiian monk seals. Hawaii's wetland and forest refuges contribute to the recovery of several rare bird species found only in this archipelago.

Want to know more about your national wildlife refuges or get involved? Call 1-800-344-WILD; visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service home page at <http://www.fws.gov> and click on National Wildlife Refuge System; or better yet, visit some of your 500-plus national wildlife refuges across the country!